

quotas for export of onion for the next crop year would be announced in advance and periodic quotas would be released based on harvest/market arrivals and flush/lean season availability. Government's export policy for onion will benefit both the growers as well as the businessmen safeguarding consumer requirements.

- (c) No, Sir.
- (d) Does not arise.

Suicide by Tobacco farmers

-6. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO:
DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

- (a) whether tobacco farmers are committing suicide as STC did not purchase the produce from the farmers of Andhra Pradesh in Veerulapadu Mandal;
- (b) if so, the reasons for not lifting the stocks by STC; and
- (c) the action proposed to ensure that farmers are given time to repay loans in view of hardships faced by them?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) No, Sir.

- (b) Does not arise.
- (c) Banks have been advised not to recover crop loan advances from the tobacco farmers sales of the first two lots put for sale at the auctions.

Strategic partnership treaty signed between India and EU

7. SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

- (a) whether India and European Union have signed a strategic partnership treaty mainly covering economy and trade;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the extent to which the treaty would promote the Indian interests in

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bilateral and multilateral trade; economic and financial issues and improve business avenues?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Deteriorating Balance of Trade

8. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the situation of India's balance of trade is deteriorating;

(b) if so, what are the details of the balance of trade during the last three years; and

(c) what are the reasons for widening of the gap between exports and imports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) The details of the balance of trade during the last three years are as follows:

Year	Value (in US \$ billion)
1997-98	-6.48
1998-99	-9.17
1999-2000*	-8.62

*Data for 1999-2000 are provisional and subject to change.

As evident from above data, situation of balance of trade has not deteriorated during 1999-2000. The balance of trade depends on the gap between exports and imports; the imports are essential to meet our requirements of fuel, raw materials and capital goods for export industries.

Alternative Crops for Tobacco

9. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Hon'ble Prime Minister during his recent